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News in Perspective

Red China Labors Toward Socialism And a New Arrogance Is in the Air

By Dennis Bloodworth

This is the first of a series of articles by Dennis Bloodworth, chief Far East correspondent for the London Observer, who has just toured Communist China. It was written in Hong Kong to escape censorship.

HONG KONG — Today, the streets of Peking have burst into color. The women grow their hair long or sport permanent waves, they wear Western frocks, jeans, and even lipstick is not unknown.

In Shanghai, as in the Capital roof-garden restaurants throw dances, uninspired bands thump out jazz. Idle crowds watch baseball.

There are Peking bars that stock 60 brands of Chinese cigarettes and 200 types of hard liquor China sells scented dress material, perfumed earrings.

But this painstaking frivolity, inspired by a decadent West, while dazzling the impressionable foreigner, has little to do with reality

Living Standards Low

Behind the screen of cheerful idlers are the hard-working 600 millions whose standard of living has risen little in the past three years and who will probably never see a yard of offensively scented export silk.

China has abandoned her measured gait and is tearing down the road to socialism today, careless of potholes and snags. Everything must be done "better, faster, more economically."

China must overtake Britain industrially in 15 years, or 10 years, or five.

In meetings all over the country organized by factories and trades unions, workers agree to multiply production 10 times, to reduce target dates by half, to make two hands do the work of six.

This is the "great leap forward" that will keep the nose of every Chinese down to at least two grindstones, if not more.

Standards Sagging

It nevertheless remains to be seen if even Chinese stamina can stand the pace. "People are making themselves stupid with overwork here," a Communist told me, and I noticed that the standards of 1955 were sagging. Chinese officials often seemed dazed with fatigue.

Districts of Peking that pushed workers into putting in 10 and even 12 hour days, reverted sharply to eight hours after men fell asleep at their jobs. Railway services have been speeded up according to the time-table, but three out of four trains I took in China were hours late. There were flies in the stations, cockroaches in my sleeper.

In Peking all new building is functional and hideous. It is also often showy but useless. Plaster falls quickly, the first rain brings damp, floors sag. In the new diplomatic quarters there are new houses which have been uninhabitable since they were built.

Many Changes

Yet the changes wrought in the three years since I was last here are little short of fantastic. The outskirts of Peking are unrecognizable for the new roads, the factories built or being built, the vast new airport whose terminal looks like a Victorian penitentiary.

Dirty little towns like Loyang and Chengchow have become great complexes of spanking new plants.

On the outskirts of Wuhan vast stretches of land which in 1955 were covered by nothing more than course grass are smothered by a monstrous industrial suburbia. In one section alone I counted 260 imposing barracks and dormitories housing the workers of adjacent factories.

Arrogance in the Air

The Chinese are justly proud of what they have achieved, but while a visit to China three years ago was an exhilarating experience, today it fills one with foreboding. Most Chinese officials remain unfailingly courteous, but there is an aggressive arrogance in the air, the mannerless self-assertion of the giant whose growing strength allows him to disregard politenesses and principles alike.

of Foreign Trade, told me coolly he was "extremely dissatisfied" with my past writings which he considered "provocative slander." Repeated applications to see a junior official in the Foreign Ministry were finally met only after four days of telephoning, and with the rejoinder: "You may come and see me at three this afternoon."

The Chinese are beginning to treat foreign opinion and reaction as cut-price commodities. Amid slogans demanding world peace, Peking is plastered with huge posters depicting small indeterminate green devils being shot, hanged, knifed, drowned, sandbagged and otherwise eliminated by large impassive Arab friends of President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The point is that, quite illogically, it is the Arabs who are large. The underlying mentality is that of the bully, not of the champion of the weak.

Incessant Indoctrination

Meanwhile rectification, indoctrination, incessant campaigns about surpassing the West in 15 years, retaking Formosa, killing sparrows, flies, whatever it may be, keep the work-drugged Chinese off balance, and all combine to replace individual thinking with an automatic reflex.

Loud-speakers in public squares, press and radio, street organization committees that can whistle up a mass meeting in half an hour, all dinned into the heads of the millions that sparrows must be killed because they eat grain.

Subsequently an acquaintance of mine spent an afternoon thumbing through old paintings with an intelligent Chinese antiquarian who was a mine of informed comment. When they came to a silk scroll depicting birds my friend remarked they were sparrows. For the first time the face of his companion became a mask. "They eat grain," he said.

The cicadas of China all start singing together and all stop simultaneously, as if directed by one master mind. They appear to have no private life and no private thought. Vociferously, multitudinously, they set an example that all in China must now follow.

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News in Perspective

Peking Sees Moscow as a Clumsy Ally

By Dennis Bloodworth
London Observer Correspondent

This is the second in a series of articles by Dennis Bloodworth, chief Far East correspondent for the London Observer, who has just toured Communist China. It was written in Singapore to escape censorship.

SINGAPORE—What passed between Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and Chinese Communist Chairman Mao Tse-tung at their meeting in Peking in early August is still largely secret.

But the joint Mao-Khrushchev communique and subsequent international developments have been revealing, despite the secrecy.

The communique called for holding summit talks at once, although in reality Peking is not interested in relaxing international tension. But it also devoted disproportionate space to condemning Yugoslav "revisionism," a subject on which China is infinitely more sensitive than the U. S. S. R.

Khrushchev evidently bowed before Mao's objections to the holding of a Middle East conference within the United Nations Security Council, for after leaving Peking he proposed a debate in the General Assembly, instead.

But when the meeting approved a resolution that successfully blunted the edge of the crisis in the Arab world, Communist Chinese guns opened up on Nationalist-held Quemoy within 48 hours.

This move, however, must be read in the light of information from Russian sources in Peking that Mao asked for more arms for China and Khrushchev made certain promises.

The urgent necessity for this top-level, give-and-take session becomes clear if it is set against the background of Sino-Soviet relations, of the delicate balance that Moscow and Peking must always strike between their divergent ambitions if Communist solidarity is to be preserved.

Sublime Arrogance

The Emperors of China regarded all other states as inferior, and this sublime arrogance remains a fundamental characteristic of Chinese thinking today. Smarting under the indignities inflicted by foreign barbarians, past and present, and conscious of the unchallengeable heavyweight status that a growing population of more than 600 million confers, Peking's regime demands that every Chinese pour out his sweat to make of China the most powerful modern state in the world as quickly as possible.

The discipline, unity of purpose and power of coercion that this effort demands can be achieved only through Stalinism in the Communist context, and the "hundred flowers" campaign last year proved to China's leaders that no deviation from Marxism-Leninism, as Mao interprets it, must be permitted.

But since China is still relatively weak and depends on the solidarity of the Soviet bloc as a whole at this stage, any tendency within it toward liberalization, toward tolerating variations on the rigid ideology that cements the bloc, toward opening the door to alien democratic influences, is anathema.

Peking's policy that the world remain divided into two opposed camps and that international tension be maintained has three roots.

It springs from a desire to exclude dangerous Western political thought, from an emotional hatred of the Western powers that have backed Chiang Kai-shek and refused Peking recognition, and from the need to keep the hard-pressed Chinese millions at an uncritical nationalistic fever pitch in an atmosphere of constant campaigns and crises.

Reliable Communists connected with Chinese foreign relations consequently told me that China's sectarian leaders deeply distrust Khrushchev. For them he is an unworthy successor to Stalin's throne, a waverer who toys with democracy at home and is not firm in his policies abroad.

"Always Blundering"

"These people are always blundering," a Peking Communist told me loftily. "The Russians mishandled the Belgrade deviation by primarily attacking Yugoslavia as an enemy state instead of the 'contradictions' in Yugoslav ideological thinking. Yet it is the unity of Marxist thought, not the union of Socialist states which is our strength. Weak Soviet policy was also responsible for the Hungarian revolution and for the trouble in Poland. These people never seem to grasp that, first and foremost, it is men's minds that you must change."

From great heights, China, preoccupied with her ideological and economic revolution, is ready to instruct a Soviet Union that started more than 30 years earlier, that has passed through the Stalin Era, and that is now immersed in the problems of interstate relations. Private Russian comment on the Chinese and their conceits is often quite unprintable.

But while Moscow may be impatient of China's ambition to persuade the Socialist world to conform to her ideas and needs, China is not only a fabulous material and strategic asset to the Soviet bloc, but an example that all Asia may be persuaded to follow.

China, on her side, is so obsessed by the necessity for Soviet solidarity that Peking would never risk an open breach. Behind the flowery expressions of friendship lies a firm business partnership, for before China can kick Russia down she must first climb to supremacy on Russia's shoulders.

The most stabilizing factor in Sino-Soviet relations today is Peking's dependence on the Soviet Union. It is still the U. S. S. R. which provides the foundation and scaffolding for her reconstruction.

The Soviet Union is supplying the blueprints, technicians and most of the machines for 211 major industrial enterprises now being completed in China. Moscow has advanced loans at interest rates of 1 to 1.5 per cent. Most of China's oil comes from Russia and much of her road transport.

Aid Not Freely Given

Russian aid is not freely given and must be paid for in agricultural products, raw materials, consumer goods and foreign exchange to a tune that recently reduced Peking to supplying such items as ping-pong balls in an effort to meet her commitments.

Things are not what they were. The days when Peking disposed of the credits and Soviet equipment was pouring into China are almost past.

Today, China is faced with the business of footing the bill and there is no news of further Russian munificence.

It is not surprising, therefore, if China is doing a little economic rethinking. Eager for quick industrial power and economic independence, Peking is developing a formidable drive for the creation of tens of thousands of small plants run on Chinese genius for improvised backyard industry, as against building vast factory complexes whose construction requires four to five years and much expensive advice and equipment from friendly but pragmatic Socialist countries.

Given this gentle but greasy downward slope in Sino-Soviet relations it becomes difficult to gauge the extent to which Moscow can act as a brake on an increasingly self-assertive Peking.

Today, Khrushchev has bought a tactical relaxation in the Middle East with a blank check transfer of tension to the Strait of Formosa. A bargain has been struck that must admirably suit Peking, whatever the misgivings in Moscow, for although Russia may, in the last analysis, still control today, her leaders must bear in mind that China may well hold the option on tomorrow.

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News in Perspective

Red Chinese Yield Lives to the State

By Dennis Bloodworth
London Observer Reporter

This is the third in a series of articles by Dennis Bloodworth, chief Far East correspondent for the London Observer, who has just toured Communist China. It was written in Singapore to escape censorship.

SINGAPORE — The Peking kiddybus is undoubtedly among the world's odder vehicles, the front half of a bicycle pedaled by some sweating trishaw driver, the back an entire miniature wooden bus on two wheels.

The first one I saw was passing a long grim barrack of a building, at each window of which a woman was almost ferociously cleaning the metal lattices. Perhaps nothing could have expressed more eloquently the changing pattern of life in China.

The kiddybus removes children from their homes and takes them to a state nursery or kindergarten. It brings some back in the evening, but others stay there all week, returning to their parents only over Saturday night. The barrack is a state dormitory in which women city-workers live an all-girls-together existence, although the majority of them are married.

As collective thinking replaces individual thought in China, so communal living is gradually ousting the family tradition. So far only a minority has to take advantage of the "Li Pai Liu" the "Saturday night" system whereby the women of a dormitory all sleep elsewhere except for one who may thus enjoy some privacy with her husband. But the signs are unmistakable. In the agricultural cooperatives of Szechuan I saw individual farmhouses demolished and great tenements, equipped with communal kitchens and canteens designed to accommodate a hundred families, rising incongruously in the fields.

Families Separated

In the major factory complexes of Shanghai and Hankow, the children are parked out for the week so that the wives are freed to work at the lathe, and to take their meals in the workers' canteen. In Peking and other big cities the street organization—the lowest echelon of the state control apparatus—adds to its tasks of political supervision and education the role of foster mother to the local young while the worker and his wife go their separate ways to do their daily stint for China.

Meanwhile China's leaders are playing general post with the population. City dwellers with bourgeois complexes requiring re-education are shifted out to the farms. Redundant administrative workers go "down to the country" to teach and to learn from the peasant. Trained technicians are shuttled about the provinces to pass on their knowledge. Unskilled eager beavers and unwilling volunteers alike are transferred to work on distant construction projects.

Drive for Production

The average Chinese is irresistibly caught up in the ideological and economic revolution of his country. He must forget personal considerations and strive only to be "more Red, more expert." I found in factories all over China that in addition to a basic 48-hour week, for which his production norms were constantly being raised, the worker "volunteered" to do extra subsidiary tasks which would release other men and enable staffs to be cut.

He also attended long production meetings, organized by a trade union whose sole purpose was to get more work out of him, two-hour political indoctrination classes and "rectification" get-togethers at which he confessed his own secret heresies and shortcomings to his mates and denounced others publicly for theirs. After all this, he might be permitted to fall into bed.

Life is little different for the rest of the people. All house property is being nationalized and householders must register, and be ready to give up, the iron gates of their gardens, superfluous metal articles in the home, even spare bricks and tiles. Shops and businesses have been turned virtually into state enterprises in which the original owner, employed on the staff, has only a modest share. In other cases, they have been grouped into cooperatives.

Life on the Farms

Ninety-seven per cent of all farming families have been drawn into "advanced" agricultural cooperatives — in effect collective farms in which they draw no rent for the land and stock they have contributed but are merely paid according to their work as laborers.

A recent Chinese survey shows that a "cooperativised" peasant family of six in Hunan earned about $134 a year —$22 a head. After buying staple foods, 12 feet of cheap cotton cloth and a pair of socks for each, and one pair of boots between all of them, they were left with just over 90 cents a month for the whole family.

A Peking industrial worker, wage-earner for a family of seven, was paid less than $28 a month. Rice or millet, fuel and cooking oil, services and school fees left him with $3.36 for meat, vegetables, clothes, drugs, household utensils, and so on—50 cents a head. I learned in Peking that a ministerial department head earns under $14 a week, the headmaster of a large school $15.40.

The Chinese are rationed monthly to about 25 pounds of rice (more for heavy workers), half a pound of sugar and a small quantity of pork meat. The ration of cotton, printed on one side only, is about nine yards a year at the moment.

These essentials are cheap. Second-grade rice costs 10 cents a pound, pork 37 cents, vegetables in season, 3 to 5 cents a pound. A filling canteen meal can be had for about 15 cents.

But only the cheapest and most essential foods, wearing apparel and household goods are within the pocket of the average Chinese. Window-shopping at the well-stocked state stores, where a woolen dress costs $11.20, a small radio $42, a modest watch $50.40, he can only comfort himself with one of the many national slogans: "Work hard for three years to be happy for a thousand."

Majority Seen as Content

The consensus of neutral opinion in China is: Yes, the vast majority of Chinese are relatively content and accept the regime. The intellectual is often unhappy in his socialist straitjacket, the former capitalist inevitably goes to the wall, the man who cannot fit into the pattern is ruined. But Peking has created a new collective society which offers the millions security in a new powerful China in exchange for their souls.

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News in Perspective

Peking Pushing Economy at Breakneck Speed

By Dennis Bloodworth
London Observer

This is the fourth of a series of articles by Dennis Bloodworth, chief Far East correspondent for the London Observer who has just toured Communist China. It was written from Singapore to escape censorship.

SINGAPORE — The Chungking Iron and Steel Works looked as if they had been struck by the blast from an atomic bomb. Three furnaces were brick ruins and the internal railway system was largely unusable, blocked by a metallurgical litter of abandoned castings, rusty overturned trucks and buckled plates.

"We are producing 500,000 tons of steel this year," the works manager told me, "but in 15 months' time we will treble that output."

I stared at him in frank disbelief. In 1955 the Chinese were already in the grip of a mania for industrialization and I was treated then to some very fancy figuring. But the spectacular advances made under the first Five-Year Plan are now regarded as mere plodding and statistics for the second seem to have grown wings.

Potential Stressed

China's leaders have urged their 640 millions to make a "Great Leap Forward" to "catch up or overtake Britain" industrially in 15 years or less. The Chinese have been made aware of their country's tremendous possibilities, of coal reserves estimated to be more than 1000 times those of Britain, of hydroelectric potential greater than that of all the major countries of the Western world put together.

There is not only a sharpening of the appetites of 1955, but a radical, perhaps dangerous, change in policy. Condemning the "vulgar theory of balance," Chinese economists now claim that disequilibrium between the various sectors of productive activity is normal. Production should never be slowed down in order to achieve a balance. Any such adjustments should be made "upwards." The speed of a convoy is the speed of its fastest ship.

Crash Operation

According to original estimates, for example, 7 million tons of steel would be produced this year, 12 million tons by 1962. Then, a few months ago, it was decided that production could be made to leap to 17 million tons in 1959. Now it is claimed that even this year's production may top 10 million tons. The figures for next year have therefore already become incalculable.

The Chinese say that results like this can be achieved by building new plants and enlarging existing ones, by using new and revolutionary techniques, and by permitting the enthusiastic workers to "volunteer" for extra chores.

But there are other factors. The mixture of frenzied activity and appalling disorder at the Chungking Iron and Steel Works is typical of all China. Economic development has become a crash operation, and despite admonitions to produce "more economically" as well as "faster and better," everything is sacrificed on the altar of the production target.

Foreign Designs Copied

The Chinese slash designing time by ruthlessly copying foreign designs. Machines are run at unprecedented speeds, temperatures raised well above accepted limits in heating operations. At Chungking technicians were claiming to get 90 tons of steel out of furnaces with a 50-ton capacity, and in Shanghai I saw three rolls of sheet being fed simultaneously into plastic processing machines made to take only one.

Whether these exhilarating statistics bear any relation to reality at all, nobody yet knows. Fatigue and bottlenecks still take their toll, and in China today workers in idle shops can be found lying in exhausted sleep at their benches, or even openly whiling away the time by playing cards. Yet on the one occasion I was able to check incontrovertibly with a fully informed anti-Communist expert a claim that production had been tripled in one important plant I was told, "It is perfectly true, and it could only have been done in China."

Small Plants Created

China, anxious to achieve industrial power and economic independence as quickly as possible, has hitherto relied on costly Soviet aid to build big industrial complexes whose construction requires several years. However, the Chinese, rebelling against the delays and expense involved in this slavish mimicry of Soviet industrialization, are today creating hundreds of thousands of small and medium plants all over the country. These can be built in a matter of months and can ensure a stupendous increase in production to meet local consumer demand in a short time.

Although these plants may be linked together later, they are obviously uneconomical—Chinese backyard genius has already produced the first of 50 different types of car and 173 kinds of tractor, for example.

This scheme may indeed enable China to overtake Britain, at least in sheer solid weight of output if not in quality. It will, moreover, immeasurably accelerate Peking's plans for building China into the greatest producing state in the world with an unprecedented impact on the West.

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News in Perspective

'People's Communes' Drown Voice of the Peasant

By Dennis Bloodworth
London Observer

This is the last in a series of articles by Dennis Bloodworth, chief Far East correspondent for the London Observer, who has just toured Communist China. It was written in Singapore to escape censorship.

SINGAPORE, Oct. 1—The young farmer in tattered clothes led me between fields of the transplanted rice. Across the green plain rose that mountain barrier of Szechuan which the Japanese never ventured to cross. This was the rich and tranquil country of Southwest China.

At first glance this looked like a well run farm anywhere in the world. But as I walked around I noticed differences.

There was not just one large homestead, but scores of small ones, revealing that thousands of peasants lived and worked on these acres. Yet all boundary markings had been removed and the verges plowed for crops. There were no tractors, no signs of mechanization, but in the fields I saw teams of 40 and 50 men and women working with their hands.

Some of the farmsteads were being demolished, while in the middle distance stood a grey barrack of a place, looking like a penitentiary.

This was a communal dormitory with a central kitchen and general canteen which could seat 500. Behind each of its many doors was a new home for families moved from the doomed cottages — two small earth-floored rooms.

For this was not just a farm, but an agricultural producers' cooperative. When the Chinese Communists first took over, they confiscated all land from the landlords and redistributed it in small parcels to the enthusiastic peasants. By degrees, however, the peasants were then forced into joining cooperatives in which all members pooled their land, for which they were paid rent, and their labor, for which they received piecework pay. The cooperative did all its marketing and buying through the state. Households were grouped into work teams.

By this year, these cooperatives—to which 97 per cent of the peasant households belonged — had become "advanced": the peasant received nothing for his land any more. He was once more a paid laborer, directed by a cooperative committee which he helped elect, and only dignified by the holding of one share in the company, as it were.

Today even this last stake is becoming meaningless, for the cooperatives themselves are being grouped into large "people's communes" in which his single voice is drowned.

But the Hsin Li cooperative, with its 563 households, is playing its part in an even more important drama. "You see those fields over there?" the cooperative vice director asked. "They're experimental. From what we have learned from them we know we can get two rice crops and one wheat crop out of the same patch of land every year. But to do this you have to waste nothing, to give the land everything you've got."

This year, he said, wheat output on the farm would reach 1800 pounds per acre, but next year it would be 25,000 pounds per acre—nearly 18 times as much. The first rice crop of 1958 had yielded 3600 pounds per acre. The second would yield nearly 20,000 pounds.

When I questioned these figures I found they were based on the yield of the highly-dosed experimental acreage. The vice-director nevertheless insisted that comparable increases in production could be achieved by ploughing deeper, using better seeds and more fertilizer, and by planting so closely that 10 shoots would grow where one grew today.

This was not just an isolated case of excited figuring. The national planning of China is based on such forecasts.

But can the Chinese repeat on a nation-wide scale anything like the output achieved on a few thousand selected acres? And will the soil stand up to such treatment or are the Communists about to turn their country into a dustbowl?

Agricultural experts agree that modern science has opened the way for almost incredible leaps in output, and this year China is producing nearly 39 million tons of wheat—2 million tons more than the United States—70 per cent more than last year. China also has vast expanses of land as yet untilled in her outer provinces.

But the question-mark remains.

Furthermore, this grain gamble is important in a far wider context. It is of vital interest to the world that China should be able to finance her industrial program with agricultural produce and still feed her growing population without being obliged to expand outward.

Today, about every one human in four is a Chinese. In 30 years, there may easily be one billion of them. One can only hope that Peking's dream of increased farming output does not turn into nightmare, not only for China but for the rest of the world.